

The TINDER BOX

by MARIA THOMPSON DAVISS
AUTHOR OF "THE MELTING OF MOLLY"



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He slid along the railing of the porch and down into the chair in almost a daze of bewilderment.

"Polk," I began, concealing a gulp of terror. "I love you more than I can possibly—"

"Say, Polk, I let the pup get hung by her apron to the wheel of your car out in the road, and her head is dangerous kinder upside down. It might run away. Can you come and get her loose for me?"

CHAPTER VI.

Deeper Than Shoulders and Ribs. HENRIETTA'S calmness under dire circumstances was a lesson to both Polk and me, for with two gasps that sounded as one we both raced across the porch, down the path and out to the road where Polk's runaway stood by the worn old stone post that had tethered the horses of the woovers of many generations of the minds of my house.

But, prompt as our response to Henrietta's demand for rescue had been, Cousin James was there before us. He stood in the middle of the dusty road with the tumbled mite in his arms, soothing her frightened sobs against his cheek with the dearest tenderness and petting Sallie on the back with the same comforting.

"Oh, Henrietta, how could you nearly kill your little sister like this?" Sallie sobbed. "Please say something positive to her, James!"

"Henrietta," began Cousin James with a suggestion of embarrassment at Polk's and my presence at the domestic scene. Polk choked a chuckle and I could have murdered him.

"Wait a minute," said Henrietta, in her most commanding voice. "Sallie, didn't you ask me to take that pup from Aunt Dilse, 'cause of the phthisic and keep her quiet while the kit got a nap and then ask you if it would be all right if I got her back whole and clean?"

"Yes, Henrietta, but you—"
"Ain't she whole all over and clean?" "Yes, but—"

"Couldn't nobody do any better than that with one of them twins. I won't try. If I live to bring her back, I'll be in my own way." And with her head in the air she marched up the walk to the house.

At this Polk shouted, and the rest of us laughed.

"Polk, please don't encourage Henrietta in the way she treats me and her little sisters," Sallie begged between her laughs at her half-sister's loved sobs. "I need my friends' help with my children, not to have them make it hard for me. Henrietta is devoted to you, and you could influence her so for the best. Please try to help me make a real woman out of her and not some sort of a terrible-terrible suffragette."

Sallie is the most perfectly lovely woman I almost ever saw. She has great violet eyes, with black lashes that beg you for a piece of your heart, and her mouth is as sweet as a bluish rose, with cheeks that almost match it in rosieness. She and the babies always remind me of a cluster rose and roses, flower and buds, and I don't see why every man that sees her is not mad about her. They all used to be before she married, and I suppose they will be again as soon as the craze gets entirely worn off her clothes. As she stood with the bubbly baby in her arms and looked up at Polk I couldn't see how he could take it calmly.

"Sallie," he answered seriously, with a glint in his eyes over at me, "if you'll give me a few days longer I will then have found out by experience what a real woman is, and I'll begin on Henrietta for you accordingly."

"Don't be too hard on the kiddie," Cousin James answered him, with the sparkle in the corner of his eye that might have been called shrewd in eyes less beautifully calm. "Let's trust a lot to Henrietta's powers of observation of her mother and her neighbors."

"Isn't that old mossback a treat for the sight of gods and men?" asked Polk with a laugh as we all stood watching the old gray coat flapping in the warm breeze that was rolling across the valley.

"I don't know what I would do without him," said Sallie softly, with tears suddenly misting the violets in her eyes as she turned away from us with the baby in her arms and went slowly up the front walk of Wideglades.

"Please come stay with me a little while, Evelina," she pleaded back over her shoulder. "If I feel faint—"

I hesitated, for, as we were on my side of the road, Polk was still my guest.

"Go on with Sallie, sweetie," he answered my hesitating. "I don't want the snapped off fraction of a declaration you were about to offer me. I can hide my time and get my own. With which he turned and got into his car as I went across the street.

Jane, I feel encouraged. I have done well today to get halfway through my declaration of independence, though he doesn't think that is what it is going to be to Polk. If I can just tell him how much I love him before he makes love to me we can get on as sensible footing with each other. I'll command the situation then.

But suppose I do get Polk calmed down to a nice friendship after old Plato's recipe, what if I want to marry him?

Do I want to marry a friend? Yes, I do! No, no!

There are many fundamental differences between men and women which strike deeper than breadth of shoulders and number of ribs on the right side.

Men deliberately unearth matters of importance and women stumble on the same things in the dark. It is then a question of the individual as to the complications that result.

This has been a remarkable afternoon, and I wish Jane had been in Glendale to witness it.

"Say, Evelina, all the folks over at our house have gone crazy, and I wish you would come over and help Cousin James with 'em," Henrietta demanded as I sat on my side porch calmly hemming a ruffle on a dress for the kitten. Everybody sews for the twins, and, as much as I hate it, I can't help doing it.

"Why, Henrietta, what is the matter?" I demanded as I hurried down the front walk and across the road at her bare little heels. By the time I got to the front gate I could hear sounds of lamentation.

"A railroad train wants to run right through the middle of all their dead



"What's the matter?" I demanded with the second shake.

people, and Sallie started the crying. Dead's dead, and if Cousin James wants 'em run over, I want 'em run over too." She answered over her shoulder as we hurried through the wide front hall.

Sallie sat in the large armchair in the middle of the room weeping in the slow, regular way a woman has of starting out with tears when she means to let them flow for hours, maybe days, and there were just five echoes to her grief, all done in different keys and characters.

Cousin Martha knelt beside the chair and held Sallie's head on her ample bosom, but I must say that the expression on her face was one of bewilderment, as well as of grief.

The three little Horton cousins sat close together in the middle of the old hair cloth sofa by the window and were weeping as modestly and helplessly as they did everything else in life, while Mrs. Hargrove, in her chair under her son's portrait, was just plainly out and out howling.

And on the hearth rug, before the tiny fire of oak chips that the old ladies liked to keep burning all summer, stood the master of the house, and for once in my life I have seen the personification of masculine helplessness. He was a tragedy, and I flew straight to him with arms wide open, which clasped both his shoulders as I gave him a good shake to arouse him from his paralysis.

"What's the matter?" I demanded with the second shake.

"I'm a brute, Evelina," he answered, and a sudden discouragement lined every feature of his beautiful Biblical face. I couldn't stand that, and I hugged him tight to my breast for an instant and then administered another earthquake shake.

"Tell me exactly what has happened," I demanded, looking straight into his tragic eyes and letting my hands slip from his shoulders down his arms until they held both of his hands tight and warm in mine.

Jane, I was glad that I had offered the cup of my eyes to him full of this curious intersex elixir of life that you have induced me to seek so blindly, for he responded to the dose immediately, and the color came back into his face as he answered me just as sensibly as he would another man.

"The men who are surveying the new railroad from Cincinnati to the Gulf have laid their experimental lines across the corner of Greenwood cemetery, and they say it will have to run that way or go across the river and parallel the lines of the other road. If they come on this side of the river, they will force the other road to come across too, and in that case we will get the shops. It just happens that such a line will make necessary the removal of—of poor Henry's remains to

another lot. Sallie's is the only lot in the cemetery that is high on the bluff. Henry didn't like the situation when he bought it himself, and I thought that as there is another lot right next to her mother's for sale she would not—but, of course, I was brutal to mention it to her. I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me, Sallie." And as he spoke he extracted himself from me and waded over and laid his hand on Sallie's head.

"It was such a shock to her—poor Henry!" sobbed little Cousin Jasmine, and the other two little sisters sniffed in chorus.

"To have railroad trains running by Greenwood at all will be disturbing to the peace of the dead," snorted Mrs. Hargrove. "We need no railroad in Glendale. We have never had one. And that's my last word—no!"

"Four miles to the railroad station across the river is just a pleasant drive in good weather," said Cousin Martha plaintively as she cuddled Sallie's sobs more comfortably down on her shoulder.

"I feel that Henry would doubt my faithfulness to his memory if I consented to such a desecration," came in smothered tones from the pillow on the shoulder.

And not one of all those six women had stopped to think for one minute that the minor fact of the disturbing of the ashes of Henry Caruthers would be followed by the major one of the restoration of the widow's fortune and the lifting of a huge financial burden off the strong shoulders they were all separately and collectively leaning upon.

"I exploded, but I am glad I drew the Crag out on the porch and did it to him alone.

"Evelina, you are refreshing if strenuous," he laughed after I had spent five minutes in stating my opinions of women in general and a few in particular. "But I ought not to have hurt Sallie by telling her about the lines until they are a certainty. It is so far only a possibility. They may go across the river any day."

"And, as for seeing Sallie swaddled in your consideration and fed yourself a sacrifice from a spoon, I am tired of it," I flamed up again. "It's not good for her. Feed and clothe her and her progeny—men in general have brought just such burdens as that upon you in particular by their attitude toward us—but do let her begin to exert just a small area of her brain on the subject of the survival of the fit to live. You don't swaddle or feed me!"

"Eye!" he said softly under his breath as his wonderful, gentle eyes sank down way below the indignation and explosiveness to the quiet pool that lies at the very bottom of my heart.

Nobody ever found it before, and I didn't know it was there myself, but I felt as if it were being drained up into heaven.

"Eve!" he said again, and it is a wonder that I didn't answer:

"Adam!"

I don't know just what would have happened if Uncle Peter hadn't broken in on the interview with his crustiest chips on both shoulders and so much seeking out with tears when she means to let them flow for hours, maybe days, and there were just five echoes to her grief, all done in different keys and characters.

"Who's Dodson?" I asked with the greatest excitement. It was the first time getting a whiff of the schemes of the masculine might, but I was squelched promptly by Uncle Peter.

"We've no time for questions, Evelina, now—go back to your tating, hey?" He answered me as he began to buttonhole the Crag and lead him down the steps.

"Dodson is the man who is laying down and contracting for the line across the river, Evelina," answered Cousin James without taking any notice whatever of Uncle Peter's squelching of me. "If this other line can just be secured he will have to come to our terms—and the situation will be saved."

As he spoke he took my hand in his and led me to the gate, talking the front walk to the gate, talking as he went for Uncle Peter was chuckling on ahead like a steam tug in a hurry.

"And the shades of Henry will again assume the maintenance of his family," I hazarded with lack of respect of the dead, impudence to Cousin James about his own affairs and unkindness by implication to Sallie, who loves me better than almost anybody in the world does. And I got my just punishment by seeing a lovely look of tender concern rise in Cousin James' eyes, as he stopped short in the middle of the walk.

"I want to go back a minute to speak to Sallie before I go on downtown," he said quickly, and before Uncle Peter's remonstrances had exploded he had taken the steps two at a bound and disappeared in the front door.

"Sooner he marries that lazy lollypop the better," fumed Uncle Peter as he waited at the gate. "The way for a man to quench his thirst for woman eyes is to marry a pot of honey like that and then come right on back to the bread and butter game. Here's a letter Jasper gave me to bring along for you from town. Go on and read it and do not disturb the workings of my brain while I wait for James' workings of a great brain, hey?"

There is no better sedative for a woman's disturbed and wounded emotions than a little still brain work. Richard's letter braced my very drooping mind at once and from thinking into the Crag's affairs of sentiment I turned with masculine vigor to begin to mix into his affairs of finance. However, I wish that the first big business letter I ever got in my life hadn't had to have a strain of love interest running through it. Still, Dickie is a trump card in the man pack.

(To be Continued.)

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The police were notified last night that Raymond Drobowsky, of 348 Hallett street, this city, serving a term in the State Industrial school at Meriden, had escaped from that institution.

The barn of George Chamberlain on upper Reservoir avenue was burglarized during the night and a quantity of harness stolen. The police are investigating.

CALL FOR THE PRIMARIES OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, IN THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT.

The Democratic Primaries in and for the City of Bridgeport, State of Connecticut, will be held on Monday, October 11th, 1915, between the hours of five o'clock p. m., and nine o'clock p. m., in each of the voting districts in said City of Bridgeport, at which Primaries delegates shall be selected to attend a convention for the nomination of a mayor, city clerk, town clerk, tax collector, city treasurer, three city sheriffs, three selectmen, two members of the board of education, and to transact any other business that might legally be transacted by said convention. At the said Primaries, aldermanic candidates from each of the voting districts shall be chosen.

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Estate of Ellen Henaghan, late of the town of Bridgeport in said district deceased. The Court of Probate for the District of Bridgeport, hath limited and allowed six months from the date hereof for Creditors of said Estate to exhibit their claims or settlements. Those who neglect to present their accounts, properly attested, within said time, will be debarred a recovery. All persons indebted to said Estate are requested to make immediate payment to PATRICK HENAGHAN, Administrator. Narland Ave. a*p

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